DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 227 476 CS 207 176

AUTHOR Peale, Lydia
TITLE "The Great Gatsby" and the Twenties: The Notion of Structure as a Unifying Device in an Interdisciplinary Unit.
PUB DATE Jul 82
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Meeting of the National Endowment for the Humanities/Beaver College Summer Institute for Writing in the Humanities (Glenside, PA, July 1982).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Content Area Writing; Cultural Awareness; *History Instruction; Integrated Activities; *Interdisciplinary Approach; *Literature Appreciation; Secondary Education; Thematic Approach; United States History; Units of Study; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Great Gatsby; *Twentieth Century History

ABSTRACT

An effective, 3-week unit on the 1920's in America, inspired by a reading of "The Great Gatsby," is designed around the idea of structure in history, government, literature, and writing. It has the following aims for students: (1) to understand the history of the 1920s, (2) to see literature as a creative shaping of the experience of the time, (3) to understand governmental processes of the period, (4) to see that a writer's style is determined by deliberate choices, (5) to experience the process of composition, (6) to read texts for levels of meaning, (7) to react to a work of literature through a visual representation, and (8) to see the notion of structure or order as the unifying motif among the areas studied. To meet these goals, students read texts in history, government, literature, and composition and completed several writing assignments. (A first-day lesson plan and an outline of the entire unit are included.) (JL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED227476

THE GREAT GATSBY AND THE TWENTIES:

THE NOTION OF STRUCTURE AS A UNIFYING DEVICE

IN AN INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIT

Lydia Peale

NEH Writing Institute
Beaver College

July, 1982

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lydia Peale

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS207176

Acknowledgments:

To Elaine: for being a model to us all of the knowledgeable, savvy, and, most of all, warm and human "educated person."

To Peggy, Jerry, and Barry: For the right combination of theory and practicality; for humor; and for your acceptance of us as peers.

To all the writers we read: For your sometimes heavy, yet almost always helpful, ideas.

To James Britton: for my composing principle.

To my colleagues: (the most important): for creating a truly joyous and supportive community.

Although there are several broader WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM projects in which I am or hope to be involved, I want today to focus narrowly on a unit which I have taught before but which I'll teach somewhat differently after this Institute. As an aside, though, (and I'm sure this is true for many of you), one of the joys of the summer has been to find that many of the things I was doing in class intuitively have theoretical justifications - writing from different points of view, for instance.

But first, let me mention the other possibilities. I have already been scheduled with two other high school teachers to give a presentation on using writing in the classroom to our K-12 faculty in our week of inservice before the students return in August. I have many ideas for this panel but I couldn't spell them out specifically until I got back together with my colleagues. Also, Ellery, Liz and I hope to work on a three-credit two week workshop of TEACHING WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM in the summer of 1983 for Virginia high school teachers. On neither of these above ideas could I deal specifically, so I narrowed my focus to my real love, which is what and whom I'm teaching.

In my presentation today I will first of all give you the background and rationale for my paper, including both the context for my teaching unit - my community, my school, and my special program - and the purpose of my own approach to the unit. Next I will outline my specific aims for the students, then go over assignments, give you an overview of the three weeks in a handout, and finally follow the lesson plan for the first day of the unit.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE:

Farmville is a town of six thousand in rural Virginia. There is little industry, but there is one saving feature: two colleges, Longwood and Hampden-Sydney, are within a five-mile radius. The per capital income is one of the lowest in Virginia. My team members and administrator will chortle at the understatement when I say that our public school system does not receive widespread support from the power structure of our community.

Prince Edward County High School is the only public high school for our county. We have eight hundred students in grades eight through twelve. It is a Title I (Federal definition for a poverty level) school. A majority of our students receive free meals. One-third of our graduating class goes on to some form of higher education. The school is 80% black and 20% white, but progress is being made towards more balanced racial integration. As more professional people sent their children to the public schools, it became politically wise to develop a clear college prep program. Even more important was providing a direct experience of college-level assignments and demands as well as general enrichment for our high-achieving students who have literally never heard the word <u>college</u> mentioned in their homes.

The Civilization Program was begun at the High School in 1979-80 as an attempt both to enrich and challenge accelerated ninth through twelfth graders. Needless to say, there was great diversity among these students - some were children of college professors who had traveled widely and been exposed to much "culture", while others had never seen a book in their homes, nor had any family member graduated from high school. If a pro-

gram could meet all their needs, it would be a living symbol of "connections." The classes which emerged were interdisciplinary, team-taught, and double-period, and students received credit in both English and Social Studies. A major part of the courses was travel - New York every other year for World Civilization (ninth and tenth graders) and either Philadelphia or Boston plus Washington every other year for American Civilization (eleventh and twelfth graders).

CURRICULUM:

For juniors and seniors, history, government and literature come together in a perusal of the American odyssey. As an example, we study immigration in history, immigration and citizenship laws in government, and Upton Sinclair's The Jungle. In this process or experiencing the disciplines, not as separate entities but as part and parcel of each other, the student has practice in making connections and, we hope, will do it on his own in later learning.

One of the dangers of cross-disciplinary study, however, even if it has a built-in connection in chronology, is its shot-gun approach - there is no special focus through which to view the content. All is equally valuable; it sprawls beyond the eye of the reader and beyond the comprehension of the student. A helpful means of ordering the study is to find a thematic frame through which to view it. The idea for such a frame came to me while reading Britton's view that poetic writing is expressive writing upon which the writer has deliberately imposed his own structure for special purposes. I realized that an effective study of the twenties in America, my topic, could be designed around the idea

of structure as a framework.

First, in history, social, economic, and political structures can be seen as being both strengthened and threatened during this period. As examples, big business became bigger through mergers with no government interference, yet another institution, the traditional family, was changing its image drastically. Second, in government, the Constitution is a central structure of government which changed through the orderly (or at least originally intended to be so)process of amendment. Therefore, students could look carefully at the ratification and repeal of the Prohibition amendment, which of course are the Eighteenth and Twenty-First Amendments. Third, in literature, The Great Gatsby not only portrays Fitzgerald's structuring of the experience of the twenties, but a major motif of the work itself is the gradual realization of the importance of structure and order to Nick Carraway, the novel's first-person narrator. He says: "When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever" and later he sees Jordan Baker, a part of the "careless" world of Tom and Daisy Buchanan, one last time because "...I wanted to leave things in order." Finally, fourth, in writing, the structures of the clause and the sentence can be looked at in a variety of ways so that the writer has a notion of the options he has in creating style, in ordering language to his own ends.

Structure, of course, is an integral part of our lives: raw experience is given order in our very perception of it. Yet in consciously making students aware of some of the ways structure

works in four areas of study - history, government, literature, and writing - I, the teacher, could give them a "single window", to quote Nick Carraway again, through which to view the disciplines. In structuring the unit to focus on structure, I would be leading them to see connections: between government and history, between literature and history, between writing and literature, between reading and writing, and between a number of other fields and concepts.

SPECIFIC AIMS FOR STUDENTS:

During this three week unit, I have the following specific aims for students. I would like for them:

1. To gain content mastery of the history of the twenties and to understand underlying causes of events and movements.
2. To see literature as a creative shaping of that experience, with other esthetic dimensions which the author adds.
3. To understand some of the governmental processes of the period and evaluate their effectiveness.
4. To see that a writer's style is determined by deliberate choices which he makes for deliberate reasons and to practice these choices through sentence combining.
5. To experience the process of composition through stages himself, while practicing with models for invention and discourse.
6. To read texts for levels of meaning.
7. To express a reaction to a work of literature through a visual representation.
8. And finally, to see the notion of <u>structure</u> or <u>order</u> as a

unifying motif among the content studied, as "life much more successfully looked at from a single window."

ASSIGNMENTS:

Each assignment will be described in detail on the final unit plan. But briefly,

1. Reading: History: Sections on twenties from Our American Heritage.
   Government: The Constitution and text on the formal and informal amendment procedures from Magruder's American Government.
   Literature: The Great Gatsby
   Grammar and Composition: Building English Skills, 11th and 12th grade levels.
   Handouts

2. Writing:
   A. Journal assigned in and out of class
   B. Major paper on novel - Process stages to be included with final draft
   C. Short answer and essay test on history
   D. Outline of debate on Prohibition
   E. Grammar exercises from text
      Sentence combining using Gatsby
   F. A visual expression of reaction to the novel, including any background material from the decade.

FIRST DAY UNIT PLAN:

You have your handouts on a rought guide to the three weeks' study, but before we take a look at that, I'd like to go through the plan for the first day of this unit with you. Remember that a three weeks' double-period study would involve about thirty hours of class time.

Period I. A. Introduction to the journal use for this unit

1. Students write for five minutes on what they know of the twenties in America. (Expressive and Exploratory Writing)
2. Have a class discussion on the ideas and list

them on a blackboard.

3. Have the class generalize and agree on a descriptive sentence about the twenties (imposing structure on the list). Have each student save this sentence in his journal and revise and add to it during the unit.

B. Introduction to the idea of structure, order, control

1. Brainstorm for examples students have encountered (parents' rules, etc.). Put on blackboard. Have them come to some conclusion about the examples on the board. Conclusion (I hope): Life and language are highly structured.

2. Evaluate in discussion: What does structure add? What does it take away? Can it change? Why and how?

Period II. A. Give out unit plan and go over parts.

B. Give out handout from Writing in the Arts and Sciences: "Note taking from lectures", "Notes from class discussions", "Studying from class notes." Discuss.

C. Introduction to Gatsby

1. Lecture on Fitzgerald's life. Call attention to structure I use. (Discuss their note-taking.)

2. Discuss point of view of Gatsby, first person narration, as a structure. What does it do? Go over first person, using their journals as examples.

3. Begin with Nick as narrator, and how it structures the novel.

a. Read pp. 1-2 silently.

b. Write in journals (5 minutes) what they've learned about Nick in the first two pages.

c. Discuss and combine on blackboard. Students are to keep in the journals this description of Nick as a character and add to during reading of novel.

4. Prepare for assignment:

a. Give out reading guide questions for Ch. 1.

b. Give out and discuss handouts on reading literature (combination of WAS and Beyer.)

Assignment: Read Ch. 1 of Gatsby

Day two: Write in journal for five minutes on one or more of the guide questions for reading. Discussion.

Now, let's go quickly through the whole three-week plan.

OVERVIEW OF THREE WEEKS

Week One

Lit.	Hist.	Govt.	Writing
Gatsby - rd. chs. 1-4 Guide questions for each Chap. emphasize use of structure	Begin Hist. rdng. (Use Beyer and WAS for note-taking) Notion of 20's as wave Focus on changing (or weakening) of traditional structures Reaction to these changes (Ku Klux Klan) Too much structure? (Mass production and place of the individual Break in struct. Stock Market Crash		Journal Emo. and intell. response to rdng. Also writing about structur in novel Response to hist. rdng.
Week Two Gatsby-cont. rdng. Chs.5-9 Discussion emphasizing structure	Continue rdng. Review for test: (Give thesis sent. write essay) Hist. test - using above method	Amending Constitution: Structure to change within structure Read text Prepare for debate: Prohibition Debate	Journal Characters as particle, wave, field Hist. review and test Debate outline Para. evaluating own contri. to debate
Finish Gatsby Heuristic for reading-structure Work on project-visual structure			Journal writ. on novel

Week Three - Work on paper all week - Use journals at several stages - Emphasize structuring of ideas at each stage-loose to tight

Try visual project as heuristic; other invention procedures - organ.
Style - sentence ex. and sentence combining from Gats.
Drafts - Peer review and teachers - conferencing and grading done jointly

GATSBY PARTY! Research on music, dance, food, clothes, etc.

This very structured approach, as I'm sure you realize, is a deliberate attempt on my part to doubly emphasize the importance of structure and order in any endeavor and in the disciplines we've been approaching.

There are very obvious questions to ask about the limited nature of this project and of our Program. How does it affect the rest of Prince Edward County High School andthe broader area of Southside Virginia? First, I know I have to go very slowly in my own school in spreading the gospel about writing. I teach only advanced students and have a lighter student load than many other teachers. There is no way that I can go to Mrs. Faggins, who has five classes of low to average eighth graders each day and say to her - "Try having them write every X days." Instead, I've just tried to share ideas in the Teachers' Lounge, participate with my peers in workshops like those Ellery gave for us in the fall. Students talk, the word gets around gradually, and now with our Superintendent's special emphasis on writing, the time is ripe for the inservices I've mentioned before.

On a wider level, we've shared our Program syllabi, assignments, and reading list with several nearby school systems which are beginning AP courses, etc.

How are we cooperating with the colleges? First, we have had several specialists come to Civilization classes and share with us. A historian who specializes in Tudor England gave a lecture on Henry VIII and the Succession Question while we

were reading Man for all Seasons. Again, another historian whose major field is the 30's in America came and talked with us about Huey Long while we were reading All the King's Men. During our study of prehistory in World Civilization (9th and 10th grade) a Biologist shared his copies of plaster Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon skulls and his lecture on Evolution with us. Next year I hope to have visits from Shakespearean experts and to have writing teachers from the colleges' English Departments help our students with writing essays (sample) for the Advanced Placement Exam. I am also very excited about Claire Gaudiani's idea of high school and elementary teachers' spending the day with a college colleague in the same field. It's much less threatening than beginning the other way around.

And that takes me to my last rambling point - a witness. I was most moved by Claire Gaudiani's statement of the important role of elementary and high school teachers. We are often assigned to a lower status (in fact, some of us here have said that since we are teaching at a lower level, we are entitled to earthier humor, which we have practiced upon occasion.) But what we have in common with our academic compatriots at the college level, rather than how we are different, has been a most gratifying emphasis here at the Institute. It is the joint endeavor of all of us to bring our students into Elaine's notion of the "community of educated people," to enter Myrsa's "Temple of Learning."